U.S. COAST GUARD

Thirteenth Coast Guard District

Safety Alert 01-00

Tuna Fisherman Rescued off the Oregon Coast

Purpose: To provide timely safety related information of "Lessons Learned" in support of the Thirteenth Coast Guard District's Fishing Vessel Safety Program.

Incident: A 65 foot steel hulled fishing vessel, outfitted for albacore tuna, began taking on water and sank approximately 75 miles west of Tillamook Head, Oregon in the early morning of August 17, 2000. The master of the vessel woke to the sound of a high water alarm. The master went to the engine room and found the vessel to be taking on water from an unknown source. The water in the engine room was approximately two feet deep. The master immediately put out a mayday call on VHF channel 16. No further communications were sent out, the vessel continued to take on water, and the master prepared to abandon ship. He donned his immersion suit, launched the liferaft, and activated the 406 EPIRB. The Rescue Coordination Center picked up the EPIRB signal at 6:20 AM and a Coast Guard rescue helicopter hoisted the master from the liferaft at 7:30 AM.

Lessons Learned: This incident is a textbook example of a successful at-sea rescue. Each of the decisions made by the master greatly increased his chances for survival. The following are lessons learned from this event.

1. Flooding accounts for 20% of vessel loss incidents off the Washington and Oregon coast. Most flooding emergencies can be minimized or prevented by identifying common flooding sources prior to sailing, carrying readily available damage control equipment on board your vessel, and being trained in damage control techniques. The 13th District Coast Guard Fishing Vessel Safety Program provides this damage control training free of charge to interested fishermen.

2. The installation of the engine room high water alarms resulted in the master becoming aware of vessel flooding before the vessel was in extremis. The extra time allowed the master to get out a mayday call and don his survival equipment.

3. Crew training prior emergency situations is critical to managing at-sea emergencies. In this case, the master had received required Coast Guard safety drill instructor training in 1994.

4. The master was able to don his immersion suit and deploy his liferaft and safely evacuate his vessel. By abandoning the vessel in a protected state (survival suit on and liferaft deployed), the master increased his chances of survival by a minimum of 50%.

5. Activating the EPIRB allowed Coast Guard rescuers to greatly reduce the search area and find the liferaft quickly. However, the 406 EPIRB was unregistered. An unregistered EPIRB complicates rescue efforts, so it is extremely important (and required by law) that an EPIRB be registered. Registration information is available at *http://www.sarsat.noaa.gov/beacon.html*.

For additional information, contact:
LT Chris Woodley, 13th District Fishing Vessel Safety Coordinator
(206) 220-7217 or cwoodley@pacnorwest.uscg.mil